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|  |  | Cultural  Heritage Administration  NEWS | |
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| The Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage Announces the Discovery of Gold Leaf from Donggung Palace and Wolji Pondfrom 8th-century Unified Silla  - Opening of “The Blooming Flowers and Birds on 3cm Gold Leaf”, Exhibition - |

**On June 16 at the National Palace Museum, the Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage** (Kim Seongbae, Director General) under the Cultural Heritage **Administration announces the discovery of a gold leaf artifact** from the north end of the “Na” Zone of the Donggung Palace and Wolji Pond during excavation in November of 2016.**From June 17 to October 31,**the artifact will be made available **to the public through an exhibition entitled “The Blooming Flowers and Birds on 3cm Gold Leaf”** to be held at Cheonjongo, the Excavated Relics Storage Building of Gyeongju National Research Institute of Culture Heritage. The gold leaf artifact was initially discovered as two separate pieces that were approximately 20 meters from one anotherin a state that made them difficult to identify. Following conservation treatment, it was determined that the two pieces fit together to form a single artifact.

Gold with a purity of 99.99% was carefully selected to produce the gold leaf, which weighs 0.3g(0.01oz) and is 0.04mm thick. Spread out, the gold leaf is about 3.6cm wide and 1.17cm in height with intricately engraved bird and flower (*danhwa*) patterns. The bird patterns were carved at a thickness of 0.05mm, finer than a human hair (approximately 0.08mm) on both the left and right sides of the gold leaf in lines less than 0.05mm thick, and flower designs were carved (*jogeum*) around the birds and on the center of the gold leaf. Based on their form and observations of various experts, the birds are thought to be Oriental turtle doves. The flower designs are a characteristic motif of the Unified Silla Period, also seen on decorations of gilt-bronze Buddhist scripture cylinders at the Garden Site in Guhwang-dong, Gyeongju and the gilt-bronze phoenix decorations found at the temple ruins on the west side of the Hwangnyongsa Temple Site.

**\*Danhwa (團華): A design reminiscent of a flower viewed from above, created by arranging various patterns into circular shapes**

**\*Jogeum (彫金): Ametal crafting technique that involves engraving patterns or letters using tools such as metal chisels or nails**

As the designs were engraved using a very fine seal graver, the patterns are difficult to see with the naked eye and must be viewed using a magnifying glass or microscope. **The artifact embodies the essence of 8th-century Unified Silla Period metalwork and is thus considered one of the finest examples of metalwork among all artifacts discovered in Korea.** The gold leaf provides a glimpse into the artistry of Unified Silla Period craftspeople as well as a microunit scale view of the elegant metal craftsmanship of the time.

The twin bird and flower motif on the gold leaf is unlike western examples. Although this gold leaf reveals western influences, it is clear that the patterns show a unique Silla style that depicts the patterns in a highly realistic manner. The birds, in particular, are portrayed very realistically. ▲ The feathers of the bird engraved on the right are depicted in a more lively manner than those on the left,▲ and the size of the Oriental turtle doves and the shapes of their tails suggest the possibility that one female and one male are being portrayed. This realistic depiction goes beyond the scope of metalwork and may be evaluated within the context of Unified Silla Period paintings.

The pattern was engraved after fixing the gold leaf to an item such as a wooden support. Because there are no holes that were used to suspend the gold leaf, it is thought that it was directly adhered to some kind of object. In addition, considering the complete shape and traces of the finish, it appears that a larger sheet of gold leaf was first engraved and then the part to be used was later cut out. Although there are currently no examples to aid in determining how the gold leaf was used and its function, the shape of the artifact suggests that it was the end piece (*maguri*) of an unknown object with a trapezoidal cross section. However, its intricate design, which is difficult to view with the naked eye, transcends purely decorative elements and may have potentially functioned as a dedication to gods, and thus, further research on its function will be needed.

**\*Maguri*:* refers to the end or cross section of any object or elongated shape**

While the gold leaf will be made **available to the public through an exhibition with associated media art,**it can also be viewed online through a gigapixel viewer that can be accessed via QR code at the Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage website (<https://nrich.go.kr/gyeongju>), allowing visitors to closely observe the exquisite details of the artifact..

The Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage intends to continue working to reveal the significance of the expanded area of Donggung Palace, the arrangement of building features, and excavated artifacts as well as reveal the urban structure, function, and prominence of the Silla Wanggyeong (Royal Capital of Silla) through careful excavation and investigation of Donggung Palace and Wolji Pond.

Attachments

1. Promotional Material

2. Photographs, Videos